specific information pertaining to each property such as apartment size, number of bedrooms or bathrooms, cost of leasing property, availability of apartments and other amenities. If available, the user can be presented with a digitized picture of the apartment building and/or individual rooms in certain apartments. Also if available, the user can request a digital "walk through" in which a digitized full motion video clip is shown which illustrates specific rooms and features of available properties.

Further objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from a consideration of the following description and the appended claims when taken in connection with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a schematic block diagram of the system of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a pictoral screen view of a high level graphic map of the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a pictoral screen view of a lower level graphic map of the present invention;

FIG. 4 is a pictoral screen view of a graphic quadrant map of the present invention;

FIG. 5 is a pictoral screen view of a representation of a database record of the present invention including a digitized picture;

FIGS. 6a and 6b are a schematic flow chart diagram showing a method of searching for geographic specific information according to the present invention;

FIG. 7 is a schematic flow chart diagram showing a method of entering and/or updating database entries according to the present invention;

FIG. 8 is a schematic flow chart diagram showing a method of property manager information retrieval according to the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Preferred embodiments of the geographic specific information search system and method of the present invention are described herebelow with reference to the drawings.

Referring to FIGS. 1–5, the geographic specific information search system, indicated generally at **10**, includes an Internet server **12**, running an http deamon process **14**. The http deamon process **14** provides an input/output interface and establishes and manages the server's connection to the Internet **16**. The http deamon **14** also communicates with the home page **18**, which provides the user interface into the search system **10**. The home page **18** is written in Hyper-Text Markup Language (HTML) and communicates with a set of scripts **20** which provide additional processing and formulate specific database queries.

In the preferred embodiment, the database **22** is a Structured Query Language (SQL) database. An SQL deamon process **24**, running on the server **12**, manages the interface between the scripts **20** and the database **22** and is responsible for searching the database **22** for database records which meet certain search criteria. When appropriate records are found, they are forwarded to the home page **18** via the scripts **20**.

A system user accesses the home page **18** through the Internet **16**. The home page **18** can be accessed and viewed using any standard HTML browser **26** running on a remote machine **28**. The browser **26** displays home page informa-

tion forwarded from the system **12**. The browser **26** also processes and forwards user instructions to the server **12** for execution. The user gains access to the home page **18** by specifying the home page unique address.

Once reached, the home page **18** provides operation options through a menu of "point and click" items. Referring to FIG. **6**, upon selecting the option to query a database, the user is presented with a high level graphical map, as shown in FIG. **2**, as a starting point for narrowing the geographic area of the search. The high level graphical map is designated by the home page **18** as an image map. The user is allowed to select a more specific area, in this case a particular state **30**, from the high level map by moving a pointing device over the area and selecting the area (step **100**, FIG. **6**). Since the map is designated as an image map, the browser **26** returns the coordinates of the point selected on the map. The common gateway interface **17** of the http deamon recognizes the coordinates returned from the browser **26** and forwards the coordinates to the scripts **20**. The scripts access a set of map tables **21** which contain information relating to blown up map images of areas of the high level map with coordinates on the high level map. From the map tables, a blown up lower level map of the selected area is determined and displayed, as shown in FIG. **3**. The lower level map also has specific search regions highlighted, in this case specific cities of interest **32**. The user is allowed to select a specific highlighted region again by moving a pointing device over the highlighted region and selecting the region (step **102**) and the scripts identify the selected region using the map tables **21**. After selecting a city from the state map, the user is prompted to enter a search criteria **104** including number of bedrooms desired, price range, etc.. A query handler **19** receives the search criteria and, together with the SQL deamon **24**, accesses the database **22** returning property listings in the selected geographic region meeting the entered search criteria. After the search criteria is entered, a blank map of the selected city is displayed and the user is prompted to select an area of interest on the city map **106**. A quadrant map of the selected area assembled by a map compiler **23** is then displayed, as shown in FIG. **4**, containing highlighted points of interest **34**, in this case locations corresponding to available housing **106**. The map compiler **23** integrates the property listings returned from the database search into the quadrant map of the selected area at appropriate locations. Each database record includes not only property listing information but also the coordinates of the property on certain quadrant maps. Therefore, the map compiler **23** can determine where on the quadrant map to display the properties. A table builder **25** is configured to build a map table containing pointers to the property listings returned from the search as well as the coordinates of the properties on the quadrant map.

As shown in FIG. **4**, the quadrant map relates points of interest **34** with landmarks **36** in the quadrant so as to give the user a view of where the points of interest **34** lie with respect to the landmarks. When a point of interest **34** is selected by a user (step **110**), the home page **18** notifies the scripts **20** of the coordinates selected and the scripts **20** access the newly built map table to form and forward a database query to the SQL deamon **24** which searches the database **22** for the database record containing information relating to the selected point of interest **34**. The information is forwarded by the SQL deamon **24** to the scripts **20** which format the information and forward it to the home page **18** for display (step **112**). The displayed information can contain text and graphics **36**, as shown in FIG. **5**. On the display, the user is given the option to request a digitized picture of